

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR THE GLOBAL WAR ON TERRORISM: DO WE HAVE
WHAT IT TAKES?**

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ABSTRACT

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American public support is and will most likely remain supportive for the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT). Tracing the evolution of the perception of war in general and considering historical perspectives it can be concluded that the Bush Administration will be held accountable for the outcome of GWOT much like the Truman Administration was for the Korean Conflict. Without sacrifice (personal or financial) Americans will continue to view GWOT as unpopular but are willing to support it because it has not impacted their way of life. However, if the costs of the war trigger higher taxes or there is a sustained surge in American casualties the current anti-war protestors may well gain the momentum they and some members of Congress seek.

PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR THE GLOBAL WAR ON TERRORISM: DO WE HAVE WHAT IT TAKES?

Although war and warfare have evolved over time, war remains the ultimate means to settle international disputes. History (as Philip Everts asserts in his article: When the going gets rough: Does the public support the use of military force?) has shown however, waging war is not possible without public support. Gaining and maintaining public support for war must never be assumed...indeed President George E. Bush has gone to great lengths to influence the American public and maintain support for the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT). The question to examine is: does the American public support the Global War on Terrorism? While the answer may seem intuitive, my conclusions are somewhat more complex.

For the purposes of this analysis the Global War on Terrorism is synonymous with Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). Some would argue that they are not the same, but the Bush Administration has made Iraq the center-piece of GWOT by arguing that the conflict there is not a civil war; that the insurgency is Al Qaeda inspired and lead as well as supported by Iran (viewed by the administration as a supporter of terrorism world-wide). Administration officials have said that the war in Iraq is drawing terrorists from all over the Middle East and argue that a US defeat there would embolden their cause and be followed by subsequent attacks on US soil. For these reasons they are one in the same.

I will argue that there are many factors that influence public support for waging a war. These factors include; the extent of the threat to national interests, the commitment of the populace (do they have a feeling of being threatened), the cost of the war (in terms of life and national treasure), the public's perception of the justness of the cause, the duration of the war, the trust in national leadership and in modern warfare and media support. Additionally, as Moskos et al state, "Simply put, when important interests and principles have been involved, when the public has been optimistic about a successful outcome, and when bipartisan leadership support has remained steadfast, public support has typically remained robust in the face of casualties, and majorities of the public have remained willing to accept losses commensurate with their evaluation of the importance of the interests and principles at stake."¹ The question to be answered is: does the American public support the Global War on Terrorism and what are the consequences for support or lack thereof? While most of the influencers are straight forward, the concept of national interest is open to interpretation. To answer the question of public support for war or specifically the Global War on Terrorism requires a historical examination.

Our own American history is replete with examples of both publicly supported wars (the Spanish- American War, World War II, Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm) and wars that were initially publicly supported and marked by subsequent decline in support (Korea, Vietnam, and potentially the current war in Iraq). The causes for a lack of, or waning, public support are varied and will be examined. Some hold that there is a simple correlation between casualties sustained and public support. As Professor John Mueller states, "American troops have been sent into harm's way many times since 1945, but in only three cases -- Korea, Vietnam, and Iraq -- have they been drawn into sustained ground combat and suffered more than 300 deaths in action. American public opinion became a key factor in all three wars, and in each one there has been a simple association: as casualties mount, support decreases. Broad enthusiasm at the outset invariably erodes."² Upon closer examination we find a more complex relationship between war, public support, and the willingness to accept casualties. Further, there are conclusions that can be drawn that will both impact current U.S. foreign policy and serve as predictors with respect to GWOT.

As Philip Everts states "After the French Revolution introduced compulsory military service and the mass army, and as the industrial potential of nations became a primary source of power, citizens became directly involved in the preparation and conduct of war."³ Everts further states that "war has been democratized both passively and actively, and this has made the relationship between war and democracy, between the use of military force and public support for such use, into a problem of the first order of magnitude."⁴ Everts goes on to make the case for the importance of public support by stating that, "Warfare is not possible, however, when taxpayers are not willing to foot the bill for maintaining armies, and people (men in particular) are not prepared on a large scale to risk their lives as well as to kill unknown others on command."⁵ Richard Barnet makes a similar argument with respect to the American experience, "Since the founding of the Republic public opinion has been the mystery that has legitimated the authority of the state. Other nations operate on different myths. All sorts of leaders assert that they embody the will of the people by virtue of their warrior skills, their royal blood, their religious zeal. But in the United States the actions of the government, especially on vital questions of national security, cannot for long violate the strong feelings and desires of citizens when large numbers are aroused and make their feelings known."⁶ Recent guest speakers at the Army War College have highlighted the importance of public opinion and support for Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). Naval and Army senior leaders as guest speakers have highlighted the importance of information operations and maintaining public support with respect to OIF as well as the GWOT. Both indicated that since the enemy can not prevail on

the battlefield conventionally they seek to influence both U.S. and global public opinion as well as erode the will to resist.

As Everts maintains, the importance of public support is anything but new: "The public is always involved in wars-their preparation, conduct, or prevention-in one way or another, as participants or observers. That fact makes public opinion a major factor in understanding foreign policy and international politics."⁷

World War One (WWI) was a seminal event in terms of public support and the perception of war. Important conclusions can be drawn from an examination of WWI. Public support at the beginning of the war was strong. There is ample newsreel footage showing German soldiers parading through city streets being showered with flowers as they boarded trains marked with martial mottos such as "Auf Nach Paris!" (On to Paris). The French were just as eager to avenge their humiliating defeat suffered in the War of 1870. All participants viewed their cause as just at the beginning of the war and maintained that belief throughout the war. However, as the war unfolded and stagnated into trench warfare casualties mounted and destruction escalated on all sides. While WWI saw the advent of truly modern technologies (much more effective and massed artillery and machine guns, armor, airplanes, chemical and submarine warfare, and flamethrowers) that exponentially increased battlefield lethality, tactics failed to modernize. Because of the staggering number of casualties (19 million killed and 21 million wounded⁸), the unparalleled destruction, as well as the hundreds of thousands of cases of post-traumatic disorder syndrome (at the time referred to as "shell shock"⁹) the perception of war shifted on all sides. According to Wikipedia, "By the start of October 1918 it was evident that Germany could no longer mount a successful defense, let alone a counterattack. Numerically, on the frontline they were increasingly outnumbered with the few new recruits too young or too old to be of much help. Rations were cut for men and horses because of food shortages throughout Germany. German General Erich von Ludendorff had decided, that Germany had two ways out of the War; total annihilation or an armistice. He recommended an armistice to senior German officials at a summit on October 1st. Allied pressure did not let up until the end of the war".¹⁰ Germany was crumbling internally as well. Anti-war marches were a frequent occurrence and morale within the army was at low levels. The war finally ended with the so-called German November Revolution which occurred as military defeat appeared imminent and ended in the abdication of the Kaiser Wilhelm and the establishment of the politically fragile Weimer Republic.

For the Germans the cause of WWI was just and remained so throughout the war. It was only with mounting casualties and facing total destruction that public support for the war waned

to the point where an armistice was viewed as preferable to total destruction. The conclusion to draw from WWI is that while the cause of a war may be viewed as justified, if the losses or potential losses are felt to be too, great public support may well be lost to the point of a war that is no longer prosecutable. It is important to note that WWI forever changed the popular notion of war. Evan Laurd points out that "the First World War transformed traditional attitudes toward war. For the first time there was an almost universal sense that the deliberate launching of a war could no longer be justified."¹¹ The romanticized idea of war was dead, forever abandoned. As John Mueller maintains, "War has since come to be viewed as repulsive, uncivilized, immoral and futile...an idea that has flourished throughout most of the civilized world and has remained constant since then."¹²

An examination of World War Two (WWII) offers different conclusions. American support for WWII developed over time. As Richard Barnet maintains in his book *The Rockets Red Glare*, many Americans during the 1920s came to feel that America's entry into WWI was a mistake. After the rise of German National Socialism in the 1930s and subsequent rearmament, it became increasingly clear that Europe was moving toward another war. Many were determined that America should avoid war at any cost. This feeling was intensified with the Depression of the 1930s and the country's focus on domestic issues. The anti-war sentiment in America and the memories of the men lost convinced many that America must not get involved in any future European war. According to Barnet these sentiments combined with long-standing American isolationism resulted in the passage of a series of Neutrality Acts. These Acts prohibited United States companies from trading with belligerents. The show of German arms in Spain, especially the bombings of Spanish cities terrified many. Per Barnet, the growing military might of a rearmed Germany and war talk in Europe began further fueling the desire of many Americans to remain neutral. Isolationist leaders opposed any involvement in a European war and clashed with President Roosevelt who increasingly saw the need to confront both German and Japanese militarism. Barnet says that many Americans did not share his sentiment as demonstrated by the America First Committee. Per Wikipedia, "Established in 1940, at its peak America First may have had 800,000 members in 650 chapters which advocated four principles: The United States must build an impregnable defense for America, no foreign power, nor group of powers, can successfully attack a prepared America, American democracy can be preserved only by staying out of the European war and "aid short of war" weakens national defense at home and threatens to involve America in war abroad."¹³ One of America First's most prominent members was Charles Lindbergh. Lindbergh believed that America could not prevail in a war against Germany.

Many not only opposed American involvement, but even military preparedness and military expenditures were strongly opposed in the Congress. American public sentiment clearly felt that the war in Europe was strictly a European affair and that Asia was just too far away.

Against this backdrop, President Roosevelt, as Barnett maintains did see the dangers from German and Japanese militarists and managed to not only support Britain through the Lend-Lease program, but with considerable political skill managed to push through Congress measures that would prepare the country for war. One measure was the Burke-Wadsworth Act. The act was passed in September, 1940 and created the first peace-time draft in United States history. Under the Burke-Wadsworth Act, all American males between the ages of twenty-one and thirty-five registered for the draft. The government selected men through a lottery system. If drafted, a man served for twelve months. According to it's provisions, drafted soldiers had to remain in the Western Hemisphere or in United States possessions or territories located in other parts of the world.¹⁴ President Roosevelt quickly signed this bill into law. Both the Congress and the President were concerned with the military expansion of Germany, Japan, and Italy. By implementing a draft, the United States government would be better prepared if the nation became involved in the military conflicts raging in other parts of the world. It is important to note that the Burke-Wadsworth Act of 1940 was extended in August 1941 by a Congressional vote of the thinnest of margins...one. Had this act not been extended the American military would have been in an even less prepared state. This illustrates the strength of the isolationist sentiment just four months before Pearl Harbor was attacked.

After Pearl Harbor, Americans were unified for a war against the Japanese (and subsequently the Germans). I maintain that American support for World War Two remained steadfast throughout the war for the following reasons: Americans knew that national interests were at stake, they felt truly threatened, many Americans were personally involved in the war effort, Americans were kept informed of the progress of the war, effective propaganda incited a searing hatred of the enemy and finally Americans trusted their President.

Although the attack on Pearl Harbor was not technically an attack on American soil, it was enough to cause subsequent blackouts on the West Coast and a fear that California would be the next target of a Japanese naval strike. This was soon followed by blackouts on the East Coast as German submarines actively patrolled and sunk merchant ships from the coast of Florida to Maine. Fear led to the internment of Japanese-American citizens throughout the continental United States as well as open discrimination against German and Italian owned businesses as they were forced to close. Americans no longer felt protected by the Atlantic and

Pacific oceans. It was perceived that the survival of America was at stake and for the first time since the Civil War Americans feared war on their own soil.

Despite initial setbacks on the battlefield Barnett says that the American public was united as never before in support of the war effort. Millions were drafted (for the entire war period more than 10 million men were drafted). The United States devoted nearly 40% of its gross national product to the war effort.¹⁵ According to the Time-Life series on WWII (The Home Front: USA), thousands served as Red Cross volunteers, millions participated in the Victory Garden program, supported scrap metal drives, bought War Bonds and endured rationing for virtually all goods and commodities. Every American felt they had a personal role to play in achieving victory. Everyone knew someone that had been drafted; therefore, the level of commitment was unparalleled.

The Japanese were transformed in the public mind overnight from sub-humans, to superhuman monsters bent on destroying human civilization. According to Barnett the success of the Japanese offensive in late 1941 and early 1942, culminating in the barbarity of the Bataan death march, lent credence to this view and despite these initial setbacks on the battlefield the American public was united as never before in support of the war effort.

From the attack on Pearl Harbor through the end of World War Two the American public remained solidly committed to the war effort and President Roosevelt. As Douglas Kriner notes, "Most studies of war and public opinion have described the gradual waning of popular support for the president as casualties mount. Impressionistically, World War II seems an exception to the rule as the country rallied around Roosevelt after Pearl Harbor and remained steadfastly behind him, even as the nation suffered casualty rates that would dwarf those of all subsequent military actions."¹⁶

Perhaps the most valuable lessons to be learned are from wars that were unpopular. Everts points out, "Compared with nondemocratic states, democracies are relatively well qualified to wage wars that are total, with respect to war aims and the mobilization of resources, or on the other hand, wars in which the risks are small (for example because of escalation dominance or the weakness of the opponent). Democracies however face severe problems when success is elusive or when trade-off between costs (especially in terms of human lives) and interests is seen as unfavorable for other reasons."¹⁷ Everts goes on to examine the perception of threat and support for war, "Moreover, in cases not having to do with immediate threats, particularly individual or collective self-defense, but rather peacekeeping or collective security, a level of support in the order of two thirds may look impressive but may turn out to be insufficient for cases of comparatively low perceived importance."¹⁸ Simply stated, Everts

maintains that short of total war and where the citizenry perceives a threat, democracies lack the staying power to prosecute a war. The Korean Conflict as well as the Vietnam War are examples of this theory.

To appreciate the evolution of American public support for these conflicts it is important to understand developments after 1945. The conclusion of World War Two, the emergence of the Soviet Union as a world super-power (evidenced by the detonation of a Soviet nuclear device in 1949) and the Communist Chinese takeover on mainland China signaled the beginning of the Cold War and the creation of a strong anti-communist movement. As Barnett states “The glue of the new consensus was anti-Communism, for here was the issue that brought foreign policy home. As a result of massive education campaigns by the government, business, churches, and the media, the issues of Soviet foreign policy and the influence of domestic Communism in American life were neatly merged in the public consciousness.”¹⁹ In short, hatred and fear of Communism replaced that of Totalitarianism and Imperialism of World War Two.

Per Barnett, the National Security Council Report 68 (NSC 68), a classified report issued on 14 April, 1950 was a seminal document that guided American foreign policy throughout the Cold War. It called for a massive American military build-up to not only contain the spread of Communism world-wide but destroy it. NSC 68 spells out a policy designed to “(1) block further expansion of Soviet power, (2) expose the falsities of Soviet pretensions, (3) induce a retraction of the Kremlin's control and influence, and (4) in general, so foster the seeds of destruction within the Soviet system.”²⁰ NSC 68 called for significant military spending that Barnett points out was at the time feared to be staggering, “Permanent mobilization would require a fourfold increase in military spending from \$13 billion to almost \$50 billion. This would mean permanent high taxes.”²¹ This would cost, by estimates a significant portion, potentially more than the 20% of GDP the United States was already spending on defense.

While there was a palpable public fear of Communism, the Truman Administration was worried that public opinion would not support such a massive and sustained military build-up as was required. These were the developments just prior to the Korean Conflict.

Initially met with strong American public support the Korean Conflict was thought by the Truman Administration to confirm the validity of NSC 68 and serve as a political windfall and catalyst for increased defense spending. Barnett writes of the 25 June 1950 invasion, “Here was open military aggression, a clear and simple event that authenticated for anyone with a radio or a television set the apocalyptic worldview of NSC 68. Hitler had been dead only five years, and the familiar pictures were back: columns of advancing tanks, refugees with pushcarts, villages on fire.”²² Barnett goes on to state “The support for the American military response was

almost universal-the *New York Times*, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Senator Joseph R. McCarthy, ADA, Walter Lippmann (an American journalist, author and political commentator who advocated the need to respect a Soviet sphere of influence in Europe), Robert Taft, even Henry Wallace (former Secretary of Commerce under the Roosevelt Administration who was fired by Truman because he did not support a hard-line anti-Soviet policy).²³ Early support for American intervention on the Korean Peninsula is further documented by a 77% approval rating for sending American troops into combat. Barnet cites printed media support "Not a single major American daily expressed a word of disapproval."²⁴

Despite initial public and bi-partisan support for intervention Barnet's so-called consensus unraveled. Barnet says that the reasons for this change are: poor performance of US troops initially deployed to Korea, public bickering between Democrats and Republicans not only on the conduct of the war but the value of support for Asia vice Europe, Chinese intervention and subsequent route of UN forces, the relief of General Douglas MacArthur and the length and costs of the war compared to perceived threat.

The first American combat forces to arrive on the Korean Peninsula came from occupation forces in Japan. Part of the 24th Infantry Division, known as Task Force Smith, engaged in their first clash of the war with North Koreans at Osan on 5 July 1950. General MacArthur thought sending the 24th Infantry Division would be an "arrogant display of strength"²⁵ – and suffice to intimidate and ultimately stop the North Korean advance. Fate proved differently. The soldiers of Task Force Smith were minimally supplied based on the anticipation of their mission as a short "police action." They had been issued two days' C-Rations and about the same amount of ammunition (120 rounds per man). There were no barrier materials or mines available. Many of their 2.36-inch rockets were deteriorated and old, as were the mortar rounds. Lacking sufficient logistics and anti-armor capability they were easily routed by the North Koreans. In a humiliating defeat the Commanding General of the division, Major General William F. Dean, as well as the division colors were captured by the North Koreans later that same month.²⁶ Only five years after defeating three great aggressive powers the Task Force Smith experience not only illustrated the decline in US military readiness but also served to undermined US public confidence and repudiate the notion that this would be a quick and easy war.

Task Force Smith also marked the end of a very short-lived period of bi-partisan support for the war. As Barnet points out "By mid-July North Korean forces had pushed MacArthur's army back into a small perimeter around Pusan. Columnists warned of an "American Dunkirk." According to Barnet, the Republicans now sensed that they had the near-perfect issue on which to return to power. Suddenly, the battle for democracy-legitimated by an overwhelming United

Nations endorsement of the American response-became "Truman's war."²⁷ Although the Truman Administration viewed the Korean Conflict as validation of NSC 68 it was believed that "The world balance of power would be decided in Europe, not Asia."²⁸ Truman's Secretary of State, Dean Acheson, felt that "Korea was a godforsaken, strategically inconsequential appendage to an Asian morass."²⁹ As Barnet points out though, "Korea had been transformed into a symbol. The Europeans would be watching to see whether the United States would stand up to Communist aggression. The American taxpayer could now be jolted by a real war in Asia into preparing for a hypothetical but far more important war in Europe."³⁰

Per Barnet, the Republican Party took exactly the opposite view. He maintains that they felt the place to challenge and ultimately check Communism was in fact Asia. The Republicans accused Acheson and Truman of standing idly by while Mao defeated Chang Ki-Shek and the world's most populous country became Communist. The Republicans charged that Acheson lost China and subsequently viewed that (according to Barnet) "Korea represented the bankruptcy of the Establishment's obsession with Europe. The place to fight world communism was Asia. To tie American interests to bankrupt, ungrateful European politicians was just what elitists like Acheson would do, but it was a terrible blunder, or worse."³¹ Per Barnet, this partisan infighting spilled directly in to the 1950 Congressional election and clearly indicated that bipartisan support had eroded...further impacting public opinion on the Korean Conflict in a negative way.

Barnet states that perhaps the most damaging incident to Truman and the public support for American involvement in Korea was the Chinese intervention and subsequent relief of General MacArthur. As mentioned, after initial defeat, UN forces were forced to withdraw to a perimeter surrounding the South Korean harbor of Pusan. Gradually as North Korean lines of communication were stretched thin and UN reinforcements poured in to Pusan (to include liberal use of air power) the balance of power shifted from the North Koreans to MacArthur's troops. As T.R. Fehrenbach writes in his book "This Kind of War" in what is considered a brilliant if not risky endeavor, MacArthur launched an amphibious landing at the port of Inchon. Located some 100 miles behind North Korean lines, Inchon was a complete surprise to the enemy. This invasion was timed to coincide with a breakout from the Pusan perimeter. These two initiatives effectively ended North Korea's string of victories and led to the recapturing of Seoul and the virtual collapse of the North Korean Regime. By the end of October 1950 UN forces occupied most of North Korea to the Yalu River that separated North Korea and China. MacArthur was hailed as the greatest military commander the US has ever fielded. It was a time of very short lived euphoria. On November 25th 1950 the Chinese intervened by sending some three

hundred thousand troops across the Yalu against UN forces. Barnet documents further partisanship sniping: "The Republicans in the House passed a unanimous resolution to which twenty Republican senators subscribed calling for the immediate resignation of Dean Acheson. By early January, 66 percent of respondents to a Gallop poll favored pulling out of Korea; 49 percent thought it had been a mistake to intervene in the first place. Thirty-six percent thought Harry Truman was doing a good job as president."³² This spectacular shift in American public opinion took place over a six-month period and really decidedly shifted in November with the Chinese intervention.

As UN forces reeled under Chinese pressure, in late December 1950 according to Barnet MacArthur submitted a classified request to use atomic weapons against twenty-six targets in North Korea and China. Fearing further escalation of the war and Soviet retaliation, President Truman denied the request but publicly refused to rule out their use. Illustrative of further partisan bickering Barnet writes "Bernard Baruch, Senator Owen Brewster, and Congressman Mendel Rivers publicly called for using the bomb."³³ In a private letter (that subsequently became public) to House Leader Joseph Martin, MacArthur rebuked his Commander-in-Chief's limited war policy. Per Barnet, MacArthur's letter "included the ringing phrase "There is no substitute for victory" which served to become a Republican slogan. Per Barnet, Truman relieved MacArthur on April 11, 1951 which "triggered a prolonged congressional investigation of the Truman foreign policy"³⁴ and American public opinion was against the President.

The Korean Conflict dragged on for two more years as armistice talks bogged down. Both sides were locked in a tactical stalemate not very different than the trenches in Western Europe during World War One. Public support for the war dropped to 39% with China's entry and remained low until the truce was signed in July 1953. With one exception, all Gallup Polls conducted for three years after the war indicated a majority of Americans viewed the Korean Conflict as a mistake.

The Korean Conflict marked not only an evolution in the way America waged war but also the effect of public opinion on foreign policy. While WWII was to be the last total war America waged in the 20th Century, the Korean Conflict was the first real limited US war where there was no victory. Referring to MacArthur's relief, Barnet says "the duel of the president and the general served to dramatize the depth of the public opinion problem that the managers of American foreign policy now faced. The pursuit of national security had become counterintuitive. The very idea of war without victory defined twentieth-century history, American tradition (unconditional surrender), and all conventional logic. The slogan of the Right-"Why not victory?"-was far more plausible than the prescription of "the Eastern

Establishment” with its apparent willingness to endure indefinite war without resort to America’s winning weapon.”³⁵

The comparison and contrast between WWII and the Korean Conflict is extremely important to understanding public opinion and support for war and serves as illustrative of the current Global War on Terrorism. WWII, a total war, was marked by bi-partisan support and total mobilization of the civilian sector. Further, WWII saw a universal draft for the duration. Locally administered draft boards granted very few exceptions (mental and physical limitations and employment in a vital defense industry were the only exceptions). College graduates, professionals and poor dirt farmers all served together.

The Korean Conflict was completely different. It was a limited war with only a partial mobilization, a limited draft with many exceptions and only for a one-year deployment. It was marked by strong initial public support that waned in the face of initial setbacks and the Chinese intervention as well as very public partisan bickering and very low presidential approval ratings. Perhaps the single most dramatic difference is that while Americans felt there were definite national interests at stake in WWII that was not the case during the Korean Conflict. Moskos et al explain, “The answer to the question of what is a national interest does not inhere in the cause itself but rather who is willing to die for that cause. Only when the privileged classes perform military service does the country define the cause as worth the young people’s blood. Only when the elite youth are on the firing line do war losses become more acceptable.”³⁶ Moskos et al go on to make the case that when national interests are at stake (as measured by drafting the children of national elites) the willingness to accept casualties is high. They write: “In World War II, battle deaths approached 300,000. Yet casualty acceptance was high because virtually every able-bodied male served in the military.”³⁷ As demonstrated during WWII when national interests are at stake Americans will endure not just high casualties but virtually anything; taxes to pay for the war as well as rationing of basic goods and commodities and conversion of much of the civilian sector to defense industry. Again this was not the case with the Korean Conflict. Barnett writes “Opposition to the Korean Conflict was much less vocal than the anti-Vietnam War movement fifteen years later, but the Korean War was almost as unpopular. In the climate of the 1950s, people were far more reluctant to take to the streets in the midst of a war than they were ten years later.”³⁸ But according to Mueller, opposition to war is not always linked to an active war movement. “Growing opposition to the war effort also has little to do with whether or not there is an active antiwar movement at home. There has not been much of one in the case of the Iraq war, nor was there one during the war in Korea. Nonetheless, support for those ventures eroded as it did during the Vietnam War, when antiwar

protest was frequent and visible. In fact, since the Vietnam protest movement became so strongly associated with anti-American values and activities, it may have been somewhat counterproductive.”³⁹ For this reason a comparison between the Global War on Terrorism and the Korean Conflict is much more insightful than a comparison with Vietnam.

Both wars were initially supported by American public opinion. Immediately after the attacks on September 11th 2001 there was indeed a feeling of our national interests being at stake as demonstrated by national fervor to protect the country. The Department of Defense reported that fiscal years 2002 and 2003 were banner recruiting years for all services (this was prior to substantial increases in accession bonuses).⁴⁰ This period was also marked by extensive intelligence reformation, passing of the Patriot Act, massive increases in defense spending, the attack on Afghanistan to destroy Al Qaeda and President Bush’s policy of preemption which led to the war in Iraq. Arguably none of these initiatives would have been possible in a pre-9/11 America. As Mueller writes in both cases support for the war and the President was initially strong but eroded as it was viewed that national interests were not at stake (for GWOT particularly when weapons of mass destruction in Iraq were not found). The change in US public opinion during the Korean Conflict has already been documented. It is very similar for GWOT. According to the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, after 9-11 Americans rallied around President Bush as demonstrated by an approval rating of 90% just after 9-11 but that remained constant for only four months and dipped below 80% eight months after the attack and further withered to 60% sixteen months after the attack. A CBNNews.com report lists President Bush’s current (as of 9 March) job approval rating at 35%; the weakest of any second term president in 56 years...not since a January 1951 rating for President Truman of 36% as cited by Barnet. If the 2006 mid-term elections can be considered a referendum, I submit they were a referendum on the President and his administrations handling of the war not necessarily the war itself.

As previously described, while both wars became unpopular there have not been significant demonstrations against either and no opposition to the military. Per Barnet, during the Korean Conflict opposition to the military was precluded because of immediate post WWII mores. I believe outright opposition to the military now is lacking because of relatively small numbers serving in the military (fewer deployed) and the fact that (since 1973) the US has an all-volunteer force. The all-volunteer force has resulted in fewer serving (even fewer of the so-called elites serving). The average American is not engaged in the military thus citizens are no longer directly involved in the preparation and conduct of war...meaning the average American has nothing at stake in this war. The few scattered protests that have been conducted are anti-

Bush or anti-policy but pointedly not anti-military and have gained little national momentum. I submit that without sacrifice (personal or financial) Americans will continue to view GWOT as unpopular but are willing to support it because it has not impacted their way of life. However if the costs of the war trigger higher taxes or there is a sustained surge in American casualties the current anti-war protestors may well gain the momentum they and some members of Congress seek.

In a final comparison to the Korean Conflict; the outcome of the 2008 elections will most likely decide the conclusion of the war. As Mueller states “support for the war declines whether or not war opponents are able to come up with specific policy alternatives. Dwight Eisenhower never seemed to have much of a plan for getting out of the Korean War-although he did say that, if elected, he would visit the place –but discontent with the war still worked well for him in the 1952 election. Wars hurt the war-initiating political party not because the opposition comes up with a coherent clashing vision-but because discontent over the war translates into vague distrust of the capacities of the people running the country.”⁴¹

Endnotes

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